

**AFFIDAVIT OF TOM NIARHOS**

1. I am an adult over the age of eighteen (18) and legally competent to testify.
2. I am executive director of Pottstown Beacon of Hope (“Beacon of Hope”), a church-based overnight warming center program for unhoused Borough of Pottstown residents.
3. I have served as executive director of Beacon of Hope since 2020.
4. Based on my experience serving unhoused residents in the Borough of Pottstown, I estimate that there are approximately seventy-five (75) to ninety-five (95) unhoused residents living in the Borough of Pottstown at this time.
5. Beacon of Hope aims to offer thirty-five (35) beds through the warming center program on a first come, first-served basis from November 1 to May 1 each year.
6. The warming center program is open overnight and offers bedspace for approximately fourteen hours per day. Unhoused residents cannot remain at the warming center twenty-four hours per day.
7. Beacon of Hope’s warming bed program usually lacks the capacity to meet the full need for emergency housing from December to March and has no choice but to turn away unhoused residents.
8. Specifically, from December 2022 to March 2023, Beacon of Hope typically had to turn away three to eight unhoused people each night, except on nights in which the temperature dropped to 20°F or below with a windchill factor, during which times Montgomery County opened up additional emergency shelter options under its “Cold Blue” program.
9. In 2022, the Borough of Pottstown issued a cease and desist letter to Beacon of Hope, claiming that the Borough of Pottstown’s zoning ordinance does not allow the overnight warming center to operate in the Borough of Pottstown.

10. For this upcoming winter, the Borough of Pottstown informed me that Beacon of Hope will need to move locations for the warming center program every approximately thirty (30) days to continue to operate.
11. As a result of the Borough of Pottstown's direction to relocate every approximately thirty (30) days, Beacon of Hope's warming center program will be operating out of five different churches from November 1, 2023-May 1, 2024.
12. I anticipate that needing to relocate every approximately thirty (30) days will further reduce Beacon of Hope's bed capacity during part of the winter, because the church lined up to provide bedspace in January 2024 can offer only twenty-seven (27) beds rather than the usual thirty-five (35).
13. During a meeting on or around October 2, 2023, representatives of the Borough of Pottstown informed Mark Boorse of Access Services and me that it would close the homeless encampment located on Borough of Pottstown-owned land next to the Schuylkill River Trail along College Drive, Pottstown, PA (the "College Drive Encampment") in or around December 2023.
14. The Borough of Pottstown requested that Access Services and Beacon of Hope assist the College Drive Encampment residents in finding shelter housing.
15. Mr. Boorse and I explained that it would be impossible for our organizations to help the College Drive Encampment residents find shelter housing because there is not adequate shelter space available.
16. The Borough of Pottstown asked Beacon of Hope to prioritize displaced College Drive Encampment residents for our warming beds.

17. I explained that Beacon of Hope cannot prioritize displaced College Drive Encampment residents for warming beds because doing so would prevent other unhoused residents from receiving beds.

18. The Borough of Pottstown indicated that it would go forward with closing the College Drive Encampment anyway.

19. In or around October of 2023, the Borough of Pottstown put up yellow signs near the College Drive Encampment warning that it will close the encampment on December 1, 2023.

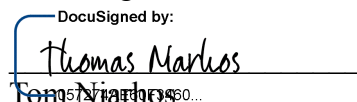
20. The yellow signs state that “[s]tarting November 1, Beacon of Hope will have shelter spaces accessible, and they can be contacted through 211 for assistance.”

21. I did not authorize the Borough of Pottstown to list Beacon of Hope on its signs.

22. I do not anticipate that Beacon of Hope will be able to offer beds to all of the College Drive Encampment residents, especially in January 2024 when our warming center has only twenty-seven (27) beds available.

23. Should the Borough of Pottstown go ahead with its plan to sweep the College Drive Encampment, I believe many or most of the College Drive Encampment residents will be forced to relocate to other outdoor spaces in the Borough of Pottstown during the winter.

I declare under the penalty of perjury that the above is true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief.

DocuSigned by:  
  
Tom Markos

10/26/2023

Date